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ABSTRACT

A profile of the state of English and English instruction in Bahrain covers the following topics: description of the role and status of English language use in industry and commerce, government, and education; the role of English at all levels of the educational system; the availability, characteristics, and qualifications of teachers of English; the type of materials support available for instruction; the type of and demand for English instruction outside the educational system; and the level of British and American support for English instruction. It is concluded that, at all levels of society, there is a recognition of the importance of English for development, communication, industry, business, and banking. The Ministry of Education is concerned about the generally poor level of English proficiency attained by those who leave school after nine years of instruction, and industries and commercial institutions are searching for ways to improve their employees' English proficiency. Factors inhibiting English instruction include conservatism among both local and expatriate teachers, dependence on the textbook as an authority on English language and methods, poor teacher training with underemphasis on teaching methods and classroom instructional skills, and inadequate English speaking competence among non-native English-speaking teachers of English. (MSE)

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# ENGLISH TEACHING PROFILE

**Country:** Bahrain

**Date:** March 1985

## 1. ROLE AND STATUS OF ENGLISH

English is the most important foreign language in Bahrain, partly because of the residual political influence of Britain but mainly because of its position as an international language. Because of the large number of expatriate workers on the island English is the lingua franca of industry and commerce except in small indigenous operations. The use of English in government and ministerial circles is widespread and two-way correspondence with government officials can often be carried on in English: however, some Ministries (e.g. Education) are increasingly sending out letters in Arabic as a matter of policy. The spread of offshore banking in Bahrain in recent years has increased the importance of English as a financial language.

English is taught as a compulsory subject in state schools and French may be studied as an optional foreign language. English is taught from the fourth year of the primary stage through to the end of secondary education (see section 2).

English is the medium of instruction in the Gulf Polytechnic (formerly Gulf Technical College), which provides post-secondary courses in engineering technology and in business studies. Most courses are conducted at technician level, but a minority of able students proceed to degree level studies in engineering and business studies. A large English Language Unit services the needs of the Polytechnic.

The University College of Arts, Science and Education, founded in 1978, uses both the Arabic and English languages for instructional purposes. The medium of instruction in the science faculties is English. The large Faculty of Education - which includes a four-year teachers' training course - teaches

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pedagogical subjects in Arabic, with English taught as a subject on the curriculum. A large service English Language Unit was being created in 1984 to meet the pressing English language needs of the University College's students.

The rapid growth of the banking sector in Bahrain since 1978 has led to increased use of English in the conduct of financial affairs. The Bahrain Bankers Training Centre, established in 1980 to give in-service training to Bahraini bank employees, uses English as the medium of instruction.

English is used as the medium of instruction in the College of Health Sciences which trains nurses and medical technicians. English is used together with Arabic in the Medical Faculty of the new Arabian Golf University, which took its first pre-clinical students in October 1984.

There is little evidence that books in English are read for pleasure by the Arabic-speaking members of the community. There are considerable sales of paperbacks in English to expatriate workers and their families on the island. Major authors - Shakespeare, Wells, Hemingway, etc. - are available in Arabic translations in the public libraries. There is little literary activity in English apart from guidebooks which generally have expatriate authorship. The English language newspapers, The Gulf Daily News and the Gulf Mirror, occasionally review new books in English. Many Bahrainis read these papers, listen to Radio Bahrain in English and watch English language television programmes.

## 2. ENGLISH WITHIN THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

The following table shows the stages at which English is taught in the schools and the number of 40-minute periods per week allocated to it:

| Level | | Periods |
|---|---|---|
| Primary | 1 | 0 |
| Primary | 2 | 0 |
| Primary | 3 | 0 |
| Primary | 4 | 6 |
| Primary | 5 | 7 |
| Primary | 6 | 7 |
| Intermediate | 1 | 7 |
| Intermediate | 2 | 7 |
| Intermediate | 3 | 7 |
| Secondary | 1 | 8 |
| Secondary | 2 | 9 |

| Level | | Periods |
|---|---|---|
| Secondary | 3 | 9 |
| University (First Year Preparatory Programme) | | 5 |

(English is the medium of instruction in the Gulf Polytechnic and in the Science Faculty of the University College of Arts, Science and Education.)

There is no pre-primary teaching of English in the state system of schools. A few private kindergartens, such as Habara and Nadeen, give instruction in English at this stage, and the following major private schools do so as well:

The Sacred Heart School

The Indian School

The Urdu School

The Bahrain School

The Awali School

The Dilmun School

English literature as such is not taught in state schools though some story material is used in language textbooks.

In the state school system English is examined as part of the Secondary School Leaving Certificate (the Tawjiheah) and is assigned considerable importance. Promotion from year to year and from stage to stage depends on achieving a satisfactory mark in English; the subjects of Arabic and religion are treated in the same way.

Entrance to the University College, the Gulf Polytechnic and the College of Health Sciences is based on achievement in the Secondary School Leaving Certificate. A high percentage in the English examination is required.

In the state system, syllabuses are centrally controlled and the textbooks to be used are chosen by the staff of the Ministry of Education's Directorate of Curriculum after consultation with the schools. Recommendations concerning the teaching of English are made within the Ministry of Education through the English Teaching Advisory Committee (ETAC). This Committee includes members of the English Adviserate, some heads of English departments in secondary schools and other teachers, and representatives of the University College of Bahrain. In 1983 the British Council Centre Director was co-opted to advise the Committee. At tertiary level, in the English departments of the University College, the Gulf Polytechnic and the College of Health Sciences there is complete freedom within the institutions to construct syllabuses and to prescribe textbooks. On the whole, students are required to cover a small number of set texts rather than to engage in extensive reading.

In the past, the impact of the English Adviserate at the Ministry of Education has been weakened because of the diversity of tasks which the Adviserate has been asked to perform: reporting on teachers, developing materials, arranging in-service training, etc. In 1983, it was decided to organize the teachers

of English in groups with an adviser assigned to each group; this has reduced the number of school visits undertaken by the advisers and has given more time for training. Senior English teachers are expected to supervise English teachers within their schools in co-operation with the advisers and to conduct on-the-job training. The English Adviserate is made up of one senior specialist and twelve advisers.

Considerable attention has been paid to the concept of English for Special Purposes (ESP) in the secondary schools, especially in the technical and commercial fields, also in the scientific, health sciences, agriculture, hotels and textiles sections. Some progress must also be noted in the training departments of the Bahrain Petroleum Company (BAPCO) and the Ministry of Works, Power and Water, where English teaching has become more integrated with the teaching of other subjects. It is hoped that a new English Language Unit being set up in the Civil Service Bureau in 1984 will stimulate more ESP work in other Ministries.

There is growing demand for the teaching of English to adults and school leavers but it is not, as yet, satisfied within the educational system. The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs has launched a vocational training scheme directed towards unemployed Bahrainis. This involves the teaching of English, among other subjects, at afternoon classes in the secondary schools and in the Gulf Polytechnic.

Largely through initiatives taken by the Director of the British Council Centre and the staff of the English Department of the University College of Bahrain, a Bahrain English Language Teachers' Society (BELTS) was established unofficially in 1983; official recognition has been sought from the Ministry of Labour. In the sphere of general commercial and managerial training, a Bahrain Society for Training and Development was set up in 1982. The British Council is represented in the Society.

## 3. TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

In the Gulf as a whole, the great majority of all teachers, including teachers of English, are expatriate: significant among them are Egyptian and Palestinian teachers together with a small number from India and Europe. However, of the 500 or so teachers of English in Bahrain, an increasing number - the majority - are Bahrainis. Of these, a large proportion are two-year trained non-graduate teachers. Some senior posts are held by a cadre of Bahraini teachers who have a Diploma in the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language from the University of Leeds.

A measure of the level of qualifications may be gained by referring to the following figures, which refer to teachers of all subjects and are for the year 1981-82:

| Qualifications | Number of teaching staff: all schools |
|---|---|
| Below secondary | 102 |
| Secondary | 860 |
| Teacher training college diploma | 1,290 |
| Post-secondary | 165 |
| Graduates and postgraduates | 1,573 |
| | 3,990 |

Full professional status is accorded those who are either teacher trained or have degrees. A large proportion of the teachers of English meet these requirements; almost without exception the Arab expatriate teachers of English are teachers trained with English as their special subject. However, some Bahraini teachers of English in primary schools have been simply secondary school leavers without specialist English training. To remedy this situation, a four-year programme of training for primary teachers was inaugurated at the University College of Bahrain in September 1982.

## 4. MATERIALS SUPPORT

The basic textbook has been Stannard Allen's Living English for the Arab World (Longman). This is being phased out and replaced by Gateway (Longman) and Crescent (OUP).

With the adoption of such textbooks as Crescent, Gateway and New Age Secondary English there has been an increase in the use of cassettes, both for general class use and for individual listening. The appointment of a British Adviser on Educational Technology has stimulated pilot projects in the use of educational television. A new Educational Technology Centre has been designed, but no timetable for construction has yet been agreed.

The English Teaching Advisory Committee has commissioned and produced considerable quantities of supplementary teaching material. The Curriculum and Materials Development Sub-Committee has concentrated on preparing fresh materials, particularly for the early stages: workbooks and readers for primary; a composition course for intermediate; listening exercises (cassettes and workbook) for secondary; workbooks for commercial secondary.

In 1979, the English of all government teachers of English was tested by the British Council. This revealed the low level of proficiency in English of a large proportion and, consequently, an in-service training programme was started in the English Department of the University College of Bahrain in 1980. The teaching has tended to be rather literary in orientation and this was recognized in 1983 when it was decided to set up an English Language Unit in the University College to cope with the needs of teachers in training and also the normal student body of the University College.

School Population Figures for 1981-82

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Primary | | 44,694 |
| Intermediate | | 17,638 |
| Secondary | | 8,845 |
| General | 4,680 | |
| Commercial | 2,636 | |
| Industrial | 1,306 | |
| Health sciences | 121 | |
| Religious | 102 | |
| Total | | 71,177 |

## 5. EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION IN RELATION TO ENGLISH TEACHING

Details for this section are not available.

## 6. DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING OF THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

Details of this section are not available.

## 7. ENGLISH OUTSIDE THE EDUCATION SYSTEM

There has been a very large demand for the teaching of English outside the education system. Many of the larger industrial, commercial and state concerns (e.g. Bahrain Petroleum Company, Aluminium Bahrain, Gulf Air, Ministry of Works, Power and Water, Civil Service Bureau) include English language learning in their in-house training programmes. Some of the teachers of English in industry are directly recruited or are employed on contract from Polyglot. Polyglot is a commercial organization teaching secretarial subjects together with Arabic and English. The Management Consultancy Group provides courses in computer science and in management. Recently it has offered a range of new courses in English language, most specific but some general. Gulf Academy and Gulf Language Services are recent additions to the list of private schools offering English classes. University College has undertaken a limited amount of contract specialist English teaching (e.g. report-writing) for commercial organizations but does not expect to offer this service extensively.

English in the commercial and industrial training sectors is often presented as English for Specific Purposes, but the standard of English of the majority of students is such that the main concentration of teaching tends to be towards general competence. Each training scheme tries to pay attention to a job-orientated range of English. This often means concentration on a choice of vocabulary items.

## 8. BRITISH SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

British personnel, other than those in the British Council's Direct Teaching of English Operation (DTEO), are deployed in English language teaching support in Bahrain as follows:

Bahrain Ministry of Education (Council-recruited Sub-Formula funded by Ministry)

| | |
|---|---|
| English - Advisers (including commercial and technical English) | 8 |
| - Senior teachers | 8 |
| Educational technology adviser | 1 |
| | 17 |

Bahrain School (Council-recruited guaranteed local contract)

| | |
|---|---|
| English | 4 |
| Other subjects | 15 |
| | 19 |

Civil Service Bureau

| | |
|---|---|
| English Language Unit - Head | 1 |
| - Inspectors | 2 |
| | 3 |

There is also a substantial British presence - on direct contract to the institutions concerned - in the English Language Units of the Gulf Polytechnic and University College and the training departments of industrial and commercial organizations.

## 9. AMERICAN SUPPORT FOR THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH

The American contribution to ELT in Bahrain has been limited to the presence of Americans in the English Language Service Units of the University College and Gulf Polytechnic on direct contracts with the institutions. In 1984 the Ministry of Education recruited the first American (a reading specialist) for the Foreign Language Adviserate. She has now been joined in the Ministry by an 'official' American English language specialist, the first arrival under a new Fulbright programme.

## 10. OTHER AGENCY SUPPORT

Details for this section are not available.

## 11. COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

Details for this section are not available.

## 12. CREATIVE WRITING

Details for this section are not available.

## 13. CURRENT RESEARCH

Details for this section are not available.

## 14. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND SOURCES OF FURTHER INFORMATION

Details for this section are not available.

## 15. GENERAL STATEMENT

The positive basis for ELT work in the Representation is the recognition at all levels of society of the importance of English for development, communication, industry, business and banking. The Ministry of Education is concerned at the generally poor standard of English attained by school-leavers at the end of nine years of instruction. For this reason, they have retained an expensive British cadre of advisers within the Ministry. Remedial measures are, however, necessary and industries and commercial institutions are searching for ways of improving the English of their employees. They either do this by setting up their own units, or by using the services of the British Council, Polyglot, Management Consultancy Group, etc.

The British Council DTEO in Manama, the English Centre, has grown into a major English language school. In the academic year 1983-84, 3,863 students were registered. The Centre provides three eleven-week terms of tuition throughout the year and a summer course during July and August. The Centre Director and Assistant Centre Director are both London-appointed posts. Locally recruited teachers vary in number according to needs: in 1983-84 they averaged fourteen full time and nine part time.

The DTEO has undertaken English language needs analyses for Bahrain Telecommunications, Bahrain Monetary Agency, Bahrain Aluminium Extrusion Company, and the Civil Service Bureau (with special reference to the Ministry of Housing). Follow-up to these studies is now awaited and it is hoped that

properly integrated work-based ESP courses will develop, either in-house or through the agency of the British Council. Meanwhile the Council has endeavoured to point the way by providing 'topic' courses. In 1983-84 the following were offered:

English for Management

English for Business

English for Secretaries

English for Banking

Many factors contribute to making ELT in the Representation less effective than it might be. Among them are the following:

There is an in-built conservatism, particularly among local and indeed among some expatriate teachers, which has tended to lead to inertia. But the adoption of new textbooks and related change in methodology are beginning to show an effect as teachers gradually come to terms with the requirements of communicative competence.

Despite innovation in materials and methodology there is a contributing dependence on the textbook as an authority on English language and methods. Teachers rarely achieve the linguistic confidence which will make them flexible in their approach and teaching methods.

Many teachers are poorly trained or were trained so long ago that their methods belong to a different era. Present in-service training schemes have gone some way towards remedying the situation.

The merging of the former teacher training colleges with the Faculty of Education of the University of Bahrain is perhaps a mixed blessing. Courses appear to be academic and exposure to practical classroom skills lacking.

The competence of many non-native teachers of English to speak English is inadequate. Consequently a poor model of the language is presented to the pupils. Moreover, teachers' reading and writing skills are not deeply enough mastered to allow them to teach these skills with ease and flexibility.

Although the situation is improving, central provision of supplementary material remains inadequate. Many teachers are insufficiently trained to develop their own.